

PALINDROME PARK

JEFF GRANT

Hastings, New Zealand

Palindrome Park is a very special place. It was established by billionaire nature-lover and palindrome fanatic Otto Markram at his retreat near Tassessat in the remote Air Mountains of Morocco. This unique botanical and zoological park has only 26 enclosures, each housing a different palindromic specimen. Some may surprise you—there are plants, animals, birds, fish, insects, and even a mythical creature!

Examples are provided for every letter of the alphabet, from A to Z. A little palindromic license has been used in some cases, but that just adds to the atmosphere of the place. All palindromes can be found in *Palindromicon 2*, an assemblage of over 4200 'dromes due for publication in 2002. (A few of the definitions vary.)

With the help of an information pamphlet entitled 'Journey Through a Palindrome Park', here is a brief description of the 26 exhibits in Markram's fabulous collection.

AJAJA AJAJA one of various scientific names for the tropical American roseate spoonbill. Also called AJAJA and AIAIA, this magnificent wading bird is related to the ibis. A large artificial lake is home to several hundred ajajas at the Park.

BIIB a crimson fruit-dove from the Caroline Islands in the west Pacific Ocean. So tame they will take food from your hand!

CAYAC a native of the Caribbean island of Carriacou, applied here to the handsome iguanas that grace the coastline of this tropical paradise. See these fascinating creatures basking on our lifescale rocky shore in the Oceanarium.

DIXID one of the Dixidae, a family of mosquito-like insects. The dixids can be observed in minute detail with special viewing equipment in the Dixidarium, or if you're brave enough, walk among the swarms!

EPEPE a West African tree of the Terminalis genus. Stroll through a glade of these elegant evergreens, and visit the showroom to see articles made from the hard yellowish-brown epepe wood.

FOGOROGOF a three-headed dragon from the Swamps of Smohork. One of the highlights of the Park, and a great favourite with the kids! Computer animation brings an amazingly realistic ten-foot tall model of Italian Paolo Chiari's Ghorp character to life in its swampy lair.

GIPSY'S PIG the common hedgehog. See several interacting family groups in the spacious Nocturnal House. Although savoured by some, there is no 'gipsy's pork' on the menu at the Park Restaurant!

HADEDAH a large grayish-brown African ibis, with wings tinged iridescent green. Also called the HADADAH, these stately birds live across the lake from the ajajas.

IHI the New Zealand stitchbird, a rare honey-eating bush dweller that survives in the wild only in a few offshore islands. The Park boasts two pairs of this endangered species.

JIJIJ a small-leafed tree from the mangrove swamps of Buka, one of the Solomon Islands in the southwest Pacific. A raised walkway allows visitors to amble among the jijij trees without getting their feet wet.

KAKKAK a bittern of the *Ixobrychus* genus found on the Pacific island of Guam. A marshy habitat with running water and plenty of fish provides an excellent environment for these aquatic birds.

LOCOL a small bee from the Philippines that produces sour honey and darkish wax. You can see these apian marvels at work in the Honey House (local honey is flavoured before going on sale in the Park Gift Shop).

MUTUM the razor-billed curassow, a large arboreal bird of the Amazon region. This handsome turkey-like Brazilian native is black with a bluish sheen, and brown on the belly. The mutum population is thriving in the Park's controlled climate.

NUN a South American puffbird, so-called because of its sombre colouring, which is relieved by white on the head. Walk through the Nunnery and see these friendly birds at play.

OIO the Hawaiian ladyfish or bonefish, a herring-like species with silvery scales, found in the warm waters of the Pacific. See schools of these nimble fish darting about in the Oiorama, a custom-built tropical aquarium.

PEEWEEP also called the pewit or lapwing, these large Old World plovers have an erratic, flapping flight and a shrill cry that can be heard all over the Park.

QAWAQ a sea lion from the Aleutian Islands or western Alaska. Over a dozen of these playful pinnipeds lead a life of luxury in the expansive Oceanarium.

REPPER the common foxglove or digitalis, specifically a variety grown in Pembrokeshire in Wales. Walk through the magnificent purple panorama of the Repper Gardens.

SUNNUS East African antelopes allied to waterbucks. A large herd of sunnus roams over several hundred acres of riverside grassland in the Park.

TOTTOT a fruit pigeon from the Pacific island of Guam, named for its cry. Have your photo taken with a tottot perched on your head, and a whole flock of them on your outstretched arms.

UGOGU a breed of African goats recently used in genetic studies at Liverpool University in England. Rest assured, all the animals here have only one head and four legs!

VIV zoo-keepers' slang for a viverried, a small carnivorous mammal of the Viverridae family. The Park has a fine collection of vivs, including civets, genets, palm cats and mongooses.

WOW-WOW the silver gibbon of java. A troop of these rare and beautiful East Indian anthropoid apes can be observed at close quarters on the Rain Forest Walk.

XOX a Kurdish peach, famed for its hardness in severe mountain terrain. Enjoy a walk through our xox orchard, and sample the fruit. Xox preserves, jam, yoghurt and ice cream are available in the Park Gift Shop.

YARAY a slender Puerto Rican fan palm. You may like to take a break in the Yaray Glade, and listen to the wind rustling through the emerald fronds. Distinctive hats made from dyed yaray leaves can be purchased in the Gift Shop.

ZIZ botanists' jargon for the zizyphus (or jujube), a spiny shrub of the buckthorn family which has dark-red fruit that can be dried and eaten as sweetmeats. A delicious conclusion to your day!

We hope that you have enjoyed this promenade through Palindrome Park.